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WHITMAN

THE POET-LIBERATOR OF WOMAN

Mabel MacCoy Irwin

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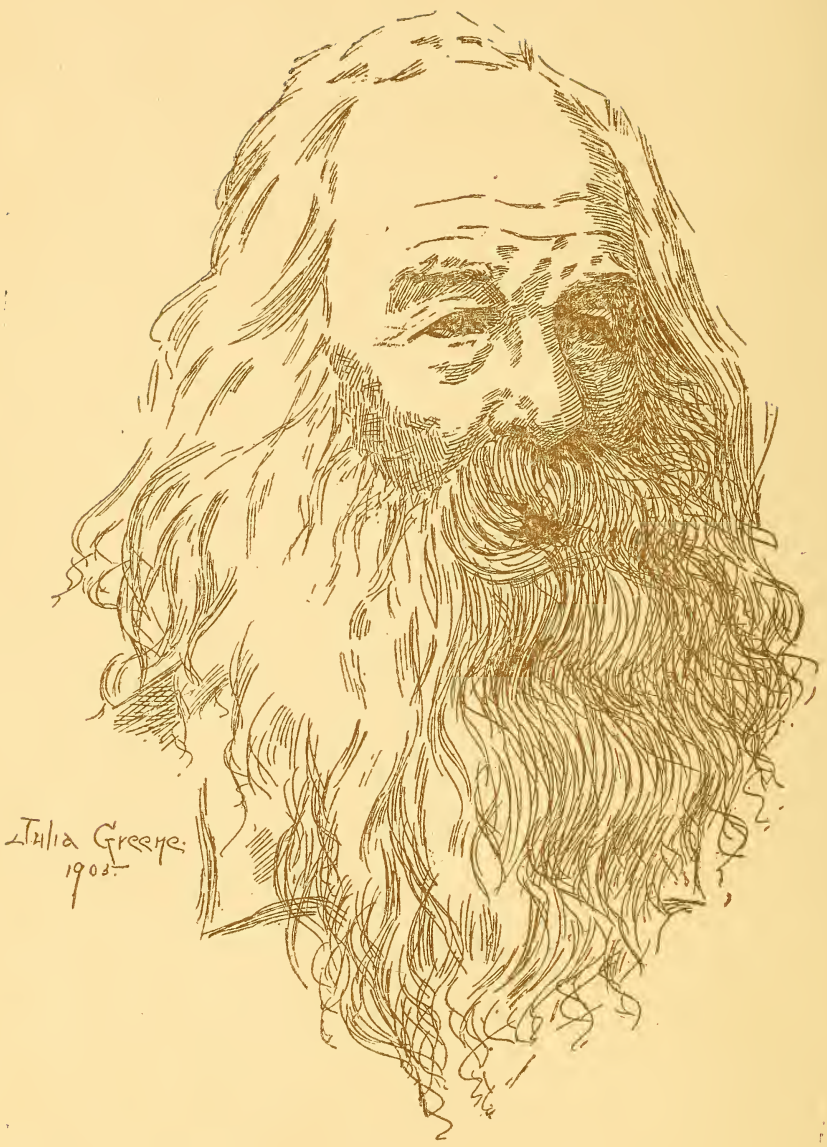
Whitman

The Poet-Liberator of Woman



WALT WHITMAN

DRAWN FROM THE "LEAR" PHOTO

Whitman

The Poet-Liberator of Woman

by

Mabel MacCoy Irwin

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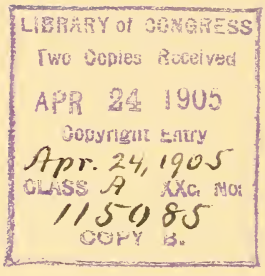

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Of this book five hundred copies have been printed and the type then distributed, this copy being number

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To All Those
Who Esteem Truth above Opinion
Freedom above Custom, and
Love above Everything

A REFLECTION

In relation to Walt Whitman I feel as "one born out of due time." That he could have lived in my day, lived in my land, lived in a city only a few miles away, and I have made no pilgrimage to that city and to him, seems to me now incredible. And yet I realize that, had I made that pilgrimage, I might not have known him, and, had I heard his words, I might not have understood. Verily one must be born again — born into the life of conscious unity with the race —

before Whitman can make himself felt, or his words be understood; since

"Only themselves understand themselves and
the like of themselves,
As souls only understand souls."

I have but recently been born into the kingdom of Whitman; I am therefore but a little child — a little sister of the "Great Companions." But none the less I am their kin, and in the following pages offer my tribute to the man who, I believe, has left on record words so infused with spirit and with life that they will write and speak themselves into the literature and language of the American people in years to come, as the words

of no other poet that our nation has produced.

His words do not clothe his thoughts — this would be to hide them — they incarnate his spirit, and it is true — as those who experience their contact well know — that he who touches them "touches a man." Through this contact life is quickened, life's horizon lifted, and the meaning of life made plain.

Whitman is creating a "taste" for himself; and I send forth this little book with the hope that it may prove an incentive to others, tempting them to taste of "Leaves of Grass," find it good, and be nourished thereby for further endeavor; with the hope that his words

will "itch at their ears" till they at last be understood.

*I had thought to embody other essays herein, treating still further of woman's liberation; but I have decided to let this interpretation of Whitman's message to woman stand alone. My life has been quickened and enriched by its writing; if, in the reading, other lives than mine are helped to feel with me the poet's quickening touch, then the double reward of receiver and giver is mine.**

M. M. I.

* I have in process of preparation a book entitled "Woman's Sex-Emancipation," in which I hope to treat the subject in a vital and thorough manner.

Whitman

The Poet-Liberator of Woman

"What place is besieged, and vainly
tries to raise the siege?
Lo! I send to that place a commander,
swift, brave, immortal;
And with him horse and foot — and
parks of artillery,
And artillery-men, the deadliest that
ever fired gun."

I. Woman's Subordination

ALT WHITMAN wrote his "Leaves of Grass" more than half a century ago. At that time woman's position in the world — even in our new world — was one of almost complete subordination. The teachings of the pulpit

— though modified somewhat from the barbarity of the church fathers — still held her as mentally and spiritually inferior to man; silence upon all public or important matters was enjoined upon her; and the old Pauline idea that if wives would know anything they must ask their husbands at home, still prevailed.

Economically woman was wholly dependent upon man. Almost no avenues of self-support were open to her. She had no individual life of her own; it was only in relation to father and husband that any dignity whatever was allotted to her; and to be known as the wife of some man, or mother of his children, was considered sufficient honor for so weak and inconsequential a vessel.

Looked down upon by church and

state; held economically dependent for her very existence upon the caprice of man; ground between the upper and nether millstones of his alleged superiority on the one hand, and her own physical necessity on the other, there was but one way by which woman could survive, and that was through the avenue of her sex.

She was like a city besieged; cut off from her spiritual supplies above, cut off from her material supplies beneath, the tenure of her life became the tenure of the parasite, and existence was impossible save by subsisting on the life blood of him who thus denied and subjected her. As only by her could children be born, or man's sensual appetite be gratified, she was held as the means

of perpetuating his name, acting the part of household drudge, or used as a toy to minister to his sex demands.

A slave herself, she bore to her lord and master slave children; and thus it had been from the beginning — humanity was groping in the darkness of ignorance and bondage, unwittingly shutting itself off from the light of freedom and truth.

Into such a state of the world, and into such a condition for woman came Walt Whitman with his "Leaves of Grass" calling:

"What place is besieged, and vainly tries to raise the siege?
Lo! I send to that place a commander, swift, brave, immortal;

And with him horse and foot — and parks of artillery,
And artillery-men, the deadliest that ever fired gun."

Whitman, with penetrating vision, saw the knot of man's misconception which held woman in bondage, and riveted his own chains, and he set himself to its untying. His was the universal vision, and his a universal work. Wherever humanity lay in the bondage of ignorance; wherever wrongs held men and women captive, he spoke the words to let in the light, and he broke the chains to set the captive free. To all places besieged with errors — hoary with age — he sent a commander — the swift, brave, immortal words of truth. He found woman — the mother of the race

— in bondage, crushed under the heel of her self-acknowledged inferiority, with no poet to champion her cause or set her free, and for her he began to sing his immortal songs:

"Daughter of the lands did you wait for your poet?
Did you wait for one with a flowing mouth and indicative hand?"

"I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,
And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man,
And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men."

From that time till now the siege has been raised; the battle for one half humanity's intellectual and economic free-

dom successfully waged, and the thought has been insinuating itself into the mind of the world, that woman is not only somewhat in her relation to man; but that she is an individual — with individual rights — in and of herself; that she is not only wife and mother, but a human being, first, last and always. Whitman has written the songs of woman's deliverance, let him who will write her laws.

II. Generic Man

IF you will read "Leaves of Grass" with a discerning eye, you will see that every message the poet brings to man as an individual, he brings equally to woman. He does not use the word "man" in its generic sense, letting us infer that

he means woman as well; but he specifies, leaving no room for doubt.

"The Female equally with the Male I sing."

"Only that which proves itself to man and *woman** is so."

"I launch all men and *women** forward with me into the unknown."

"And I say to any man or *woman*,* Let your soul stand cool and composed before a million universes."

"What do you suppose I would intimate to you in a hundred ways but that man or *woman** is as good as God."

"The great city is that which has the greatest man or *woman*." *

---

* These italics are mine. — THE AUTHOR.

"It is just possible there comes to a man or *woman,** the divine power to use words."

"Then toward that man or *woman** swiftly hasten all."

I might go on indefinitely quoting his words to show how entirely equal, to his mind, are man and woman; but this suffices to illustrate his method. Whitman does not argue the matter, he simply states the fact; he sows the seed of this truth in the mind of the world, and then continues his message to humanity with woman as one of its prime factors. Henceforth she was to be considered — not as a means to an end — but as somewhat in and of herself. America — "the great women's land! The feminine!" had arrived.

III. Whitman's Estimate of Woman

IN his estimate of woman, Whitman shows great keenness of analysis, great breadth of vision, and great understanding of the worth and dignity of the feminine. He has given to the world a new, a more complete estimate of woman than literature has yet furnished, and he is entitled to the distinction — as is no other poet past or present — of being the "Poet-Liberator of Woman." He could not set her free — this is a work she must do for herself; but he flashed upon her a transcendent light, that she might discover her own greatness — the greatness of which she is still ignorant — "Great, great, indeed, far greater

than they know is the sphere of woman." He uncovered her to herself, that she might know her own worth, then left her afraid and abashed at her own unveiling. Anne Gilchrist has said: "Whitman's poems for woman are a veil woven out of her own soul, never touched upon even with a rough hand." This veil still hides her from herself, and she does not realize her own greatness or what Whitman has done for her deliverance.

"You womanhood divine, mistress and source of all, whence life and love and aught that comes from life and love."

"Think of womanhood and you to be a woman;
The creation is womanhood;
Have I not said that womanhood involves all?

Have I not told how the universe has nothing
better than the best womanhood?"

Yes, he has told it in many ways and with a mighty tongue:

"Unfolded out of the folds of the woman,
man comes unfolded, and is always to
come unfolded;
Unfolded only out of the superbest woman of
the earth, is to come the superbest man of
the earth;
Unfolded only out of the friendliest woman,
is to come the friendliest man;
Unfolded only out of the perfect body of a
woman, can a man be form'd of perfect
body;
Unfolded only out of the inimitable poem of
the woman, can came the poems of man —
(only thence have my poems come);
Unfolded out of the strong and arrogant
woman I love, only thence can appear
the strong and arrogant man I love;

Unfolded by brawny embraces from the well-muscled woman I love, only thence come the brawny embraces of the man;
Unfolded out of the folds of the woman's brain, come all the folds of the man's brain, duly obedient;
Unfolded out of the justice of the woman, all justice is unfolded;
Unfolded out of the sympathy of the woman is all sympathy:
A man is a great thing upon the earth, and through eternity — but every jot of the greatness of man is unfolded out of woman,
First the man is shaped in the woman, he can then be shaped in himself."

In this poem we see that Whitman recognizes woman as at once the beginning and end of all things; the crowning work of creation. In her the circle of life completes itself. From and by

her, humanity exists and finds its source and outlet again.

"Be not ashamed, women, your privilege encloses the rest and is exit of the rest,
You are the gates of the body, and you are the gates of the soul.

"The female contains all qualities and tempers them,
She is in her place and moves with perfect balance,
She is all things duly veiled, she is both passive and active;
She is to conceive daughters as well as sons, and sons as well as daughters.

"As I see my soul reflected in Nature,
As I see through a mist, One with inexpressible completeness, sanity, beauty,
See the bent head and arms folded over the breast, the Female I see."

Whenever I read these words descriptive of the " eternal feminine " as Whitman saw her, I wish I were an artist that I might paint this woman of " inexpressible completeness, sanity, beauty." This woman with " bent head and arms folded over the breast " — the attitude of self-consecrated motherhood — that I might make her immortal on canvas as he has made her immortal with his pen.

IV. Whitman Celebrates Two Great Loves

WHITMAN celebrates two great loves — the love of the sexes, and the love of comrades; he never confounds the two, nor seeks to make the one take

the place of the other. Each in its way is distinct, supreme, eternal; both are necessary to man's or woman's fulfillment. "I will write," he says, "the evangel-poem of comrades and of love." To him these are the two great factors of life, and he chants the utility and beauty of the one as freely as the other. The first great factor, sex, belongs to, and is expressive of, the procreative urge of the world —

> "Urge and urge and urge,
> Always the procreant urge of the world,"

and the other to that sweet and satisfying relation of brother to brother, and sister to sister, — comradeship — which alone makes all sane living possible.

" Fast-anchored, eternal, O love! O woman
I love!
O bride! O wife! more resistless than I can
tell the thought of you!
Then separate, as disembodied or another born,
Ethereal, the last athletic reality, my consola-
tion,
I ascend, I float in the regions of your love,
O man,
O sharer of my roving life.

We may not conclude from this poem that Whitman regarded comrade-love as higher or more spiritual than sex-love — only different.

" Have you thought there could be but a single
Supreme?
There can be any number of Supremes — one
does not countervail another, any more
than one eyesight countervails another."

Man's love for woman anchors him — holds him close to the heart of things — is his harbor of peace, his rest, his home; while the comrade-love gives him scope and breadth of companionship, as he sails life's deep and trackless seas.

And yet our poet realized that the most perfect sex-love involves all loves, all relationships — completing itself in comradeship; for he sings:

"Lover divine and perfect comrade;
Waiting content, invisible yet, but certain."

And again:

"Yet, O my Soul Supreme! . . .
Knowest thou prophetic joys of better, loftier love's ideal — the divine wife, the sweet, eternal, perfect comrade?"

It is said that Whitman never knew a great love; never awoke to the "master passion"; that the only question he put to everything — sex-love included — was this: "Will it help breed one good-shaped, well-hung man, and a woman to be his perfect and independent mate?" — all other love to him meant comradeship. This may possibly be true; but he laid the foundation upon which the "master passion" must build, unless it would forever leave tragedy in its wake — the foundation of the woman as the independent mate of the man.

I cannot forego, however, the following exquisite love-lyric that he gives us in "The Mystic Trumpter," in which the spirit of love itself seems voiced:

"Blow again trumpeter! and for thy theme,
Take now the enclosing theme of all, the solvent and the setting,
Love, that is pulse of all, the sustenance and the pang,
The heart of man and woman all for love,
No other theme but love — knitting, enclosing, all-diffusing love.

"O how the immortal phantoms crowd around me!
I see the vast alembic ever working, I see and know the flames that heat the world,
The glow, the blush, the beating hearts of lovers,
So blissful happy some, and some so silent, dark and night to death;
Love, that is day and night — love, that mocks time and space,
Love, that is crimson, sumptuous, sick with perfume,
No other words but words of love, no other thought but love."

V. No Sex-Inequality

IN the matter of sex-fulfillment, Whitman makes no distinction between man and woman. He does not for a moment allow that — in the nature of things — their necessities are contradictory; and this, too, in the face of man's abnormal sex-development, and woman's equally abnormal sex-deficiency — although I doubt if this was as marked in his day as in our own. He assumes that what is integrally good for one, is good for the other — admitting no inequality here any more than elsewhere.

Any sane treatment of this subject must admit that, while man and woman are distinctive, they are yet complemen-

tary, and there can be no real sex need in the one, that is not met by and answered to in the other. And it should be plain to those who give sober thought to the subject, that any state or condition of civilization which decries or fails to recognize this fact, is a false condition, and a false civilization.

This false idea Whitman saw could be remedied only by letting in upon it the light of truth, bringing men and women to a primal sanity; and there is no doubt but that this full, wholesome unveiled admiration and exaltation of sex shall, in the end, prove the precipient that shall order and direct it into channels of purity and health.

VI. Sex-Function and Parenthood

IN Whitman's dealing with matters of sex, there is one thing most noticeable: he never dissociates the use of sex-function from parenthood. He recognizes nothing of what Bernard Shaw so cleverly satirizes as "the greatest invention of the nineteenth century — the artificial sterilization of marriage!" Whitman sings of "What the divine husband knows," of "the work of fatherhood," and of "the great chastity of paternity" in such language, that it might be embodied in psalm and sung in the congregations of the righteous.

"I shall demand perfect men and women out of my love-spendings.

. . . . . .

"I shall look for loving crops from the birth, life, death and immortality I plant so lovingly now."

And all this, too, at a time in our history when to speak of the act of begetting in anything but a shamed whisper, was to be considered bold and immodest to the last degree. Many of us acquainted with the growing body of literature upon this subject, and accustomed to hear these things discussed in open meeting, are not shocked to-day by his words; but when "Leaves of Grass" first saw the light, even the far-seeing philosophers felt that to speak of the sex-passion with such utter openness of

approval, was to run the risk of making void everything the poet had written.

I know that there are those who claim that Whitman's idea of love is of a transitory and irresponsible nature — that he believed in and advocated the yielding to sex-impulse with no thought or care for antecedents or consequents — and there are some of his poems which, on the surface, warrant this conclusion; but it is a surface conclusion at best. It is true that in some of his poems, notably: "One Hour to Madness and Joy" and "From Pent-Up Aching Rivers" we catch this strain celebrating sex-delights, as if pleasure alone were the end to be sought. But even here we find these words:

"O savage and tender achings!
I bequeath them to you, my children."

And again:

"Singing the song of procreation,
Singing the need of superb children, and therein
superb grown people;

. . . . . .

"I celebrate you act divine, and you children
prepared for."

In a recently published journal of his, we find the following paragraph: "It is said, perhaps rather quizzically, by my friends, that I bring civilization, politics, the topography of a country, and even the hydrography, to one final test, — the capability of producing, favoring, and maintaining a fine crop of children — a magnificent race of men and women.

I must confess I look with comparative indifference on all lauded triumphs of the greatest manufacturing, exporting, gold-and-silver-producing nation, in comparison with a race of really fine physical perfectionists."

If ever there walked a man who felt to fulness the purport of the saying, " No man liveth to himself and no man dieth to himself," that man was Walt Whitman. Every poem, every word springs from and contributes to this sense of unity with the race — with America first, and after America with all the world. He saw himself as a link in the mighty chain of humanity, and every act of his fraught with an eternal meaning. What wrong, what folly then to read into his words concerning sex — the very

source of race continuity — a meaning which would make of him a libertine, with no thought or care except for that which ministered to his immediate sense-gratification.

As John Burroughs has pointed out to us, had Whitman merely talked about sex we should not have objected so; but when he embodied sex-acts and represented himself as doing them, it seemed time for the prudent to withdraw their support.

His determination to thus treat the subject of sex was evidenced from the beginning. In his first poem, "Starting from Paumanok," he openly avows his purpose; he tells in unmistakable language what he is determined to do:

> "And sexual organs and acts! do you concentrate in me, for I am determined to tell you with courageous, clear voice to prove you illustrious."

And he declares elsewhere he will do this, even though he stand sole among men. He further tells us that it is his conviction that "the repressing of any direct statements concerning sex, has led to states of ignorance, depletion and covered-over disease, forming certainly a main factor in the world's woe. A non-scientific, non-aesthetic, and eminently a non-religious condition." To remedy this he outlined an attitude; that it should be taken for granted that "motherhood, fatherhood, sexuality and all that, belongs to them, can be asserted, where it comes to question, openly, joy-

ously, proudly, without shame or the need of shame.

VII. Changed Attitude Toward Sex

IN his "Backward Glance o'er traveled Roads," Whitman tells us that he felt the time had come when the attitude of "superior men and women" must be changed towards things of sex, and he set himself to bring about this change. For this we should be eternally grateful — even though he used severe measures to accomplish his purpose. So important did he consider this that he says: "Of this feature intentionally palpable in a few lines, I shall only say the espousing principle of those lines so

gives breath of life to my whole scheme, that the bulk of the pieces might as well have been left unwritten were those lines omitted"; and he asserts that his work must stand or fall with them. He saw that the perversions, abnormalities — as well as the pathological conditions — of sex, could be dealt with only by a frank avowal of its usefulness, and the ardent support of its inherent goodness and beauty. And he says elsewhere, "Anything short of this attitude impugns creation from the outset." And he adds: "That is what I felt in my inmost heart and brain, when I only answered Emerson's vehement arguments with silence, under the old elms of Boston Common."

Whitman saw the danger that lay in his words, and he says: "Nor will my

poems do good only, they will do just as much evil, perhaps more." This is already proving itself true; for there be some who seek to excuse their loose and lawless living by quoting the words of Walt Whitman. At this, however, we should not wonder, since only to him or her who brings to these poems clean thoughts and wholesome experience do they convey their message of sweetness and light. For — as Thoreau has said — "For him to whom sex is impure, there are no flowers in nature."

VIII. Whitman Needs No Apologist

I DO not take up my pen as an apologist for Whitman — he needs none; but it nevertheless is humanity's loss that he who has done so much for the emancipation of the world from its errors should still be so grossly misunderstood. He knew that the ear of the masses was closed to him in his day — although he wrote for the masses. He knew that he — as all prophets and teachers of the past — must look to the future for his vindication.

" Not to-day is to justify me, and answer what
I am for;

But you — a new brood, native, athletic, continental — greater than before known —
Arouse! for you must justify me."

This is to be done, not by simply expounding him in words — his words are so simple that they expound themselves. Not by founding some school in his name — this he distinctly proscribed. His justification must come from those who shall be like him in sentiment, vision and life — since they and they alone can understand and justify him.

" Only themselves understand themselves and the like of themselves,
As souls only understand souls."

" Men like me," he says, — " also women — our counterparts, perfectly

equal — will gradually get to be more numerous — perhaps swiftly, in shoals."

Whitman may have been over-sanguine — in his modesty — as to the time when men and women like him should appear in " shoals," but it is already true that there is a rapidly increasing demand for his words, showing that he has created an appetite for himself, and many are tasting and find him good. Nevertheless heavy clouds still hang above some of his poems, through lack of proper study, or clean minds of those who read them.

To show how cruel, how crude, aye how ludicrous has been the interpretation of some of his most exquisite poems, take the one " To a Common Prostitute," so often quoted in derision:

"Be composed — be at ease with me — I am
Walt Whitman, liberal and lusty as
Nature,
Not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you,
Not till the waters refuse to glisten for you
and the leaves to rustle for you, do my
words refuse to glisten and rustle for you."

Listening to the matchless music of this poem's beginning, and catching somewhat the spirit of its boundless love, even shallow critics hesitate to disapprove; but when he adds:

"My girl, I appoint with you an appointment,"

they lose sight of his compassion, and give to his words the meaning of a common liaison. Have you observed carefully what follows the words "My

girl, I appoint with you an appointment"?

"And I charge you that you make preparation
to be worthy to meet me.
And I charge you that you be patient and
perfect till I come."

Could any but Walt Whitman have been so delicate, so chivalrous to degraded womanhood? Could any but Walt Whitman restore the self-respect of the poor creature — scorned even by the man who pushes her to her self-destruction? Behold the very essence of chivalry! If there be those so blind that they do not yet see the compassion of this man, that made him one with all the miserable and despised of the earth, let them read his poem "The City Dead

House," and there they will see one who wept — not over the body of the dead Lazarus — but over the unclaimed body of the poor, dead, common prostitute.

IX. Whitman's All-Inclusive Love

WHITMAN so loved the world — just as it was — so loved men and women — just as they were — wise or foolish, pure or vile — that he was determined none should escape his love.

" I make appointments with all.
I will not have a single person slighted or left away."

Seeing in himself — and every man — the germ of all evils as well as all

goods, he made himself one with the evil-doer. He was not content when he had made himself one with their sane and natural delights, he would become one with their brawlings and coarseness, their looseness and vulgarity. He saw that of all man's wanderings from his primal sanity, he had gone the farthest away in matters of sex, and so he would swing him back to his reasonable, natural orbit by going with him — if not in fact then in sympathy — into the depths of sexual vices, imputing them to himself.

> " If you become degraded, criminal, ill, then I become so for your sake."

Or as Burroughs so well says — " when the passion of human brotherhood is upon him he is balked by nothing;

he goes down into the social mires to find his lovers and equals."

In thus identifying himself with lewd persons; in thus frankly imputing to himself all sins men are guilty of; in going into the depths to purify and lift man to the sunlit heights, he has done more to emancipate woman from her sex-bondage, than all the preaching and teaching she is likely to do in a hundred years.

Men and women rise or fall together — together they are bond or free — and he who goes into the depths to liberate man from the bondage of his own sensuality, snaps, at the same time, the chain of woman, whom he enslaves. "It was an heroic sacrifice, and atones for the sins of us all — the sins of per-

verting, denying, and abasing the most sacred and important organs and functions of our bodies" to our peril, and the peril of generations to come.

"Through me" — he cries — "forbidden voices;
Voices of sexes and lusts; voices veiled and I remove the veil,
Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigured. . . ."

"Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touched from."

"The armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them,
They will not let me off till I go with them, respond to them,
And discorrupt them, and charge them full with the charge of the soul."

And in that poem, "Native Moments," in which he seems to revel in looseness and indecency, we find these words at its conclusion:

"O you shunned persons I at least do not shun you.
I come forthwith in your midst, I will be your poet,
I will be more to you than to any of the rest."

If they made their bed in hell, in hell he would be with them. Let those of us to whom vicarious atonement has been a mystery till now, see the greatest of all object lessons, Walt Whitman; for verily he has borne our sins and iniquities, and by his stripes shall we be healed.

X. Women's Misunderstanding of Whitman

IT is true that most women misunderstand Whitman, equally with men; and yet he felt assured that woman would understand him.

> "To women certain whispers of myself bequeathing, their affection me more clearly explaining."

The poems which especially repel women are those in which he treats of the intimate relation of the sexes. When they read those poems they have a sense of outraged privacy; they feel that something that should be sacred between lovers has been dragged into public view,

and given public utterance — apparently to no purpose. It seems like an exposé of that which, by its nature, should always remain covered — that which embodies the mystery of creation.

XI. Hamilton Mabie's Indictment

THE most sweeping indictment that has appeared of late upon this part of his work is from the pen of Hamilton Mabie. He says:

"The lack of fineness in Whitman; the insensibility to the appeal of the spiritual qualities of character . . . are very obvious when one studies his work in relation to women. There is nowhere any touch of that spiritual chivalry which nearly all the great poets have

shared. . . . The dream of fair woman seems never to have come to Whitman; if it had, he could not possibly have treated the most intimate relation between man and woman, as if it were a public function." "And," he adds, "this is the more singular, because his was not a purely masculine genius; there was a large infusion of the feminine in it — a certain diffused softness of feeling, a brooding affection." He also says that Whitman was not lacking in the imaginative faculty; but that "he had the richest endowment of imagination that has yet been bestowed upon any American poet."

Now it would seem strange that a man with a "large infusion of the feminine" in his nature, combined with an un-

rivalled imagination, should have utterly failed in any true *appreciation* of the feminine, or of the sacredness of sex. Is it not more likely that this titanic moralist had an underlying purpose, a purpose so great that it warranted this drastic treatment, this heroic method? Is it not more likely that this man of mighty insight diagnosed the disease that is eating out the heart of the world — the degradation and shame of sex — and probed it to the quick?

> " Do you guess I have some intricate purpose? Well, I have; for the April rain has, and the mica on the side of a rock has."

When speaking of diseased sex-symptoms, he says: " Literature is always calling in the doctor for consultation and

confession, and always giving evasions and swathing suppressions in place of that 'heroic nudity' on which only a genuine diagnosis of serious cases can be built."

XII. Sacredness of the Body

WALT WHITMAN was convinced that the only way to redeem sex, and all that pertains to it, from the shame which surrounds it, from that "sneaking, furtive, mephitic" atmosphere which pervades society and literature whenever sex is mentioned, was — first of all, to take it out of the realm of the hidden, the unfamiliar, bring it into the light, and deal with it at first hand.

" Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile,
and none shall be less familiar than the
rest."

And his " Children of Adam " poems were written with a determined effort to impress the mind with the beauty and grandeur of the body. He sings of it in the same wondering and caressing manner that he sings of the " Splendid, silent sun," " The voluptuous, cool-breathed earth," or " The capricious and dainty sea." He makes of the body a sacred thing.

" The man's body is sacred, and the woman's
body is sacred.

. . . . . .

" O, I say, these are not the parts and poems of
the body only, but of the soul.
O, I say now, these are the soul! "

Walt Whitman has taken the human body — with all its parts and functions — and translated it into the substance of the soul. If this were his only work, his name would merit a place among the immortals.

XIII. A Woman Waits for Me

HIS poem "A Woman Waits for Me" — at once a morsel for his enemies, a puzzle to his critics, and a stumbling-block to his friends — is essentially a "poem of procreation" — and was so named when first published. It carries within itself its own justification. Written a half century ago, it is easily classified as prophetic. It portrays a type of woman that Whitman saw

should some day appear — the type of woman that would respond to only such as he. It is a detailed description of her whom we now delight to call the "new woman" — a type of her in all things save that of sex-appreciation; for of this she is still ashamed or fancies herself outgrown.

"They know how to swim, row, ride, wrestle, shoot, run, strike, retreat, advance, resist, defend themselves,
They are ultimate in their own right — they are calm, clear, well-possess'd of themselves."

Here is another prophecy: "I say an unnumbered new race of hardy and well-defined women are to spread through all these states. I say a girl fit

for these states must be free, capable, dauntless, just the same as a boy."

In the "Song of the Broadaxe" he sketches for us yet another and all-inclusive type — finer than any — the picture of free, majestic womanhood:

"Her shape arises,
She less guarded than ever, yet more guarded than ever,
The gross and soiled she moves among do not make her gross and soil'd,
She knows the thoughts as she passes, nothing is conceal'd from her
She is none the less considerate or friendly therefor,
She is the best belov'd, it is without exception, she has no reason to fear, and she does not fear,
Oaths, quarrels, hiccupp'd songs, smutty expressions, are idle to her as she passes,

She is silent, she is possessed of herself, they
do not offend her,
She receives them as the laws of Nature receive
them, she is strong,
She too is a law of Nature — there is no law
stronger than she is."

Whitman saw that the power to create a new world — wherein should walk lovers and comrades — lay in the hands of such women as these. Not by laborious effort to reform the already born criminal, but, by mothering a new race, rightly conceived. He says of himself that he was " well-begotten and rais'd by a perfect mother." And he tells us that he has sometimes thought, indeed, that the sole avenue and means of a reconstructed sociology depend, primarily, on a new birth, elevation,

expansion, invigoration of woman, affording for races to come (as the conditions that antedate birth are indispensible) a perfect motherhood."

XIV. Motherhood Woman's Crowning Attribute

AGAIN he says: "Maternity is woman's crowning attribute; ever making her — in loftiest spheres — superior to the man." Whitman has made woman the *equal* of man everywhere else, now he tells us of her superior function, motherhood. This superior endowment of woman has always called forth from man something akin to worship. The master paintings of the world have had for their inspira-

tion a mother with her babe at her breast — at once the source and sustenance of all living things. And to-day — despite the sex bondage of the most of womankind — motherhood still compels man's homage and respect.

The worship that woman naturally receives and accepts from the man who loves her, arises — whether either knows it or not — from the fact of her potential motherhood — the eternal mystery of creation, that finds its culmination in her — and woe is she when the conditions of maternity are made for her so hard that she must needs divest herself of that crown.

In Whitman's poem of "Faces" he paints for us this picture:

"Behold a woman!
She looks out from her quaker cap — her face
is clearer and more beautiful than the sky.
She sits in an arm-chair, under the shaded
porch of the farm-house,
The sun just shines on her old white head.

. . . . . .

"The melodious character of the earth,
The finish beyond which philosophy cannot
go, and does not wish to go,
The justified mother of men."

This, too, belongs largely to the poems of prophecy; for neither in his day nor yet in our own, has motherhood been justified. Let the crime of abortion — which is so common to-day that scarcely a home can be found where murdered infancy lifts not its dumb cry — bear witness that my words are the words of soberness and of truth.

XV. "Race Suicide"

THERE is a protest at the present time that America's birthrate is decreasing; that the native stock is dying out, and that the extinction of the American race is impending. The immigration statistician tells us that this comes as the result of the large foreign element, which so reduces the wages of our workmen, that their children "have never been born."

The sociologist finds the reason in "the prosperity of the country which always breeds vices side by side with its luxuries — the chief vice being the shirking of the responsibility of a family," and he tells us that "Race sui-

cide " is not so much due to the struggle for existence, as the outcome of selfish affluence.

Both of these statements contain, without doubt, a modicum of truth; but we must look deeper for the real cause of the decrease of a nation's birthrate.

Motherhood has not been " justified "! Our children, for the most part, are born — not of mothers — but of wives in the performance of their " marital duties "! Motherhood is forced upon woman — she has no choice as to when or how many children she shall bear. Long has she felt the injustice of this position; long has she secretly rebelled. She has been made to see that there is no dignity in en-

forced motherhood — all the moralists to the contrary notwithstanding — and she is refusing to bear unwelcome children. She has become skillful in the use of drugs, appliances and multiform methods of prevention, and these she uses to escape conception. If wives have not yet found the way of freedom from sex-slavery, they have found the way of sterility, and it is to the use of such knowledge as *this,* that our statisticians must look to discover the prime reason of a nation's lowered birthrate.

XVI. Justified Motherhood

JUSTIFIED motherhood we shall never have, until we have free, intelligent and self-determined mothers. Neither enforced motherhood, nor mechanically hindered motherhood can ever be justified. When at last, driven by her pain and despair at the ignorant perversion and betrayal of her love to the demands of lust, woman rises into the consciousness that in her hands rests the future welfare of the world; into the consciousness that she is *indeed* "the gates of the body and the gates of the soul" and keeps guard over that sacred portal, then — and not till then — may we rightfully sing of

"The Justified Mother of Men."

XVII. Woman's Sex Freedom Imperative

WOMAN'S political and economic freedom are important; her religious freedom is necessary; but her sex-freedom — freedom to control her own life-giving function — is imperative — not only for her own further development, but for the development of the race. Without this, her political, economic, and even her religious freedom, are mere, meaningless words, — mere palliatives, which dull the pain of her galling chains and keep her from discovering the real source of her bondage, and which way her freedom lies.

Since motherhood is "woman's crowning attribute — ever making her in loftiest spheres superior to the man" — how evident it becomes that until in this loftiest sphere she is recognized as supreme — and her will becomes the law of man — nothing in the world can find its true relation, or any of the great problems of life be truly solved.

XVIII. Whitman's Greatest Work for Woman Yet to be Done

IN helping to this, Whitman's greatest work for woman is yet to be accomplished; and that America may not lose sight of the all-important issue he puts this final, this test question to her:

"With all thy gifts, America,
Standing secure, rapidly tending, overlooking the world,
Power, wealth, extent, vouchsafed to thee — with these and like of these vouchsafed to thee,
What if one gift thou lackest (the ultimate human problem never solving)
The gift of perfect women fit for thee — what if that gift of gifts thou lackest?
The towering feminine of thee? the beauty, health, completion, fit for thee?
The mothers fit for thee?

The women of America must and will answer this question. To them the daughters of all other lands are looking for the way of deliverance. Motherhood must be free! Motherhood shall be justified!

XIX. Woman's Indebtedness to Walt Whitman

AND ages hence — when woman's sex-bondage is as a dream forgotten, when she stands regnant by divine right — the self-elected mother of a new race — she shall remember with deepest gratitude the name of him who called to her while she was yet asleep, who sang for her while she was yet in chains, and whose songs did more to set her free than all the songs that were ever sung — the name of Walt Whitman.

L. of C.

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